

The Algorithm in the Interview Room: Candidate Experience and Perceived Fairness in AI-Led Recruitment Interviews

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Abstract

In a recent blog post, the American Psychological Association (APA) raises related questions about candidate experiences and perceptions of fairness of AI-driven job interviews, as AI (Artificial Intelligence) becomes a much more prominent presence in the process of hiring. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a more dominant player in the hiring process and the American Psychological Association (APA) asks related questions about candidate experiences and candidate perceptions of the fairness of AI-driven job interviews in a recent blog post. This article books-ends the presentations and summarizes the recent empirical research on how applicants feel when their resumes are used to conduct job selection in the era of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and how they feel about it, referring to the three-part framework for Applicant reactions to selection systems developed by Gilliland. The review provides evidence that on average, candidates experienced an decrease in their perception of Procedural and Interactional Justice, Twoway Communication, and Behavioural Control to that of a human-driven interviewing experience. Concurrently, recent studies have shown that these negative responses can be variable and influenced by context and design characteristics, such as transparency and explanations of AI decisions, social and telepresence conveyed by the AI interview interface, characteristics of AI literacy among candidates, as well as intentional positioning and sensitisation of candidates before the interview. The article then delves into new regulatory initiatives such as the EU AI Act, which requires transparency about the use of AI in hiring, and Illinois' AI Video Interview Act, which seeks to limit the perceived unfairness while maintaining AI-based efficiency. HR-in-the-loop approaches that aim to maintain AI benefits but regain perceived fairness are also explored. The article brings the concept of candidate experience in the context of the AI driven recruitment process to the spotlight and suggests future research for the development of efficient, fair, and candidate-friendly AI interview systems, characterized as a multidimensional assessment, incorporating two components: candidate experience with the recruitment process and how they perceive the experience mediated by AI.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; recruitment; AI-led interviews; candidate experience; perceived fairness; organizational justice; applicant reactions; algorithmic hiring

1. Introduction

In recent years, many companies in a variety of industries have increasingly relied on using artificial intelligence to make the task of hiring and selecting team members more efficient by leveraging algorithmic tools to review resumes, organize game-based psychometric tests, and conduct video interviews asynchronously or live, in which an AI acts without human intervention. Typically this is done in the name of efficiency, uniformity and less human bias in the evaluation of candidates. Despite this, studies and analysis of why candidates who faced such systems have observed a constant disconnect: while organizations are excited about the promise of AI in selecting staff, perceptions of the individuals who are selected, and those who are not, are significantly different. For the field of aesthetics, the scientists found that care was expressed in a negative way to the use of AI for personnel selection, and that applicants preferred human bias-free recruiters to human recruiters because they were perceived to be more fair. The developed literature on the subject of the candidate experience and perceived fairness in an AI-based recruitment interview is reviewed, as the interview is the most interpersonal of the recruiting involving

processes and it has become a terrain of technology mediated evaluation. Section 2 outlines the research methodology adopted for this conceptual review. Section 3 summarizes the theoretical underpinning of perceptions of fairness facing candidates and places applicant perceived interviews in a framework of existing organizational justice theory. Part 4 looks at the particular areas of candidate experience being impacted by the use of AI for interviews. In Section 5, contextual and design factors that are found to influence these reactions are examined. Section 6 explores regulatory and organizational efforts which can lead to improved fairness perceptions. The findings are discussed in Section 7 and recommendations for practice and future research are given in Section 8.

2. Research Methodology

This article is a conceptual review, and its methodology is accordingly narrative and integrative rather than statistical or meta-analytic in nature. The purpose is to synthesise the dispersed empirical and theoretical literature on candidate experience and perceived fairness in AI-led recruitment interviews into a single, coherent conceptual framework, rather than to test a specific hypothesis through primary data collection. The review draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, meta-analyses, and systematic reviews published primarily between 1993 (the publication of Gilliland's foundational organizational justice model) and 2023, identified through structured searches of Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and PsycINFO using combinations of keywords such as "AI interview," "algorithmic hiring," "applicant reactions," "organizational justice," "candidate experience," and "perceived fairness."

Sources were included where they addressed applicant or candidate reactions to AI-mediated or algorithmically supported selection interviews, whether through empirical (experimental, survey-based, or qualitative) or conceptual contributions; sources concerned solely with AI's technical or predictive-validity performance, without reference to candidate perceptions, were excluded. Screening of titles, abstracts, and full texts was conducted iteratively, and reference lists of key sources were hand-searched to identify additional relevant work. The resulting body of literature was then thematically organised using Gilliland's (1993) organizational justice model as the primary theoretical lens, supplemented by more recent constructs such as social presence, telepresence, and AI literacy, to build the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. As a conceptual review, this article does not report original quantitative findings; instead, it interprets, compares, and integrates the findings of the reviewed studies to identify convergences, contradictions, and gaps in the existing knowledge base.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Organizational Justice as a Framework for Applicant Reactions

The most prominent theoretical perspective on applicant reactions to selection systems is the organizational justice model of Gilliland (1993) that posits applicant perceptions of fairness in terms of procedural and distributive justice. Gilliland's model identifies ten procedural rules that influence the fairness reaction to a selection system, including treating others as a person, relatedness, opportunity to perform, two-way communication, and interpersonal treatment, and assumes that fairness reaction influences candidates' individual and organizational outcomes (such as intention to accept a job offer, recommend the organization, seek legal action). Indeed, this organisational concept has been adopted widely for the subsequent research on AI-selection, and remains so because it enables researchers to split the comprehensive question: Is AI fair? down into viable, testable procedural elements.

3.2 Applicant Justice Perceptions of AI-Led Interviews

In their research on the impact of AI-based interviewing on solution buyers' perceptions of justice, Acikgoz, Davison, Compagnone, and Laske (2020) undertook two studies that examined the Procedural and (Social-)Interactional outcomes of AI-based interviewing. Results revealed that, generally speaking, AI-based interviewing was perceived as less Procedural and (Social-)Interactional justifiable than human-based interviewing. They also observed that the interview type×justice dimensions interaction explained the impact of interview type on different applicant reaction outcomes; specifically, the reduction in two-way communication

was a key mechanism explaining the reduction in less favourable reactions to AI-led interviews relative to human-led interviews.

3.3 Behavioural Control and Social Presence in Algorithmic Recruitment

In a review of seven major studies involving more than 1,300 participants, Hilliard, Guenole and Leutner (2022) looked at applicants' perceptions of the procedural fairness of algorithmic recruiting tools, focusing on two sub-facets: behavioural control, how much an applicant feels they can influence the results of an assessment, and social presence, how much an applicant feels they can connect to and empathise with people involved in the assessment. While organized by study and overall procedural fairness were mostly neutral, fairness perceptions regarding behavioural control and social presence were largely negative, participants were less likely to believe that they had ways to influence the result of an algorithmic assessment than a human assessment, and there was some support that participants believed that an algorithmic assessment was more objective and less manipulable.

3.4 Comparative Fairness Perceptions of AI Versus Human Recruiters

This discussion about candidate responses to the “rejected” experience of an AI and a human recruiter has further investigated the areas of outcomes fairness and behavioural intent. This research is based on the original questionnaire asking applicants about their reactions, from the organizational justice tradition adapted to an AI-based context, and the data overall underscore that decisions made by humans are considered more fair than decisions made by AI systems, and that decisions made by AI systems result in negative perceptions of fairness, which leads to diminished acceptance to recommend the employer to a future applicant. Algorithm aversion was validated as a factor that contributes to negative perceptions of AI-based organizational decisions. This trend is reflected in the results Nørskov et al. (2020) obtained in their experimental study using video vignettes: When asked to assess a human-agent versus a robot-mediated interview for an otherwise identical job, the candidates' justice ratings were consistently distinct, with the interviewer's agent, not the content of the interview, being the primary determinant of their perceptions of the interview's fairness.

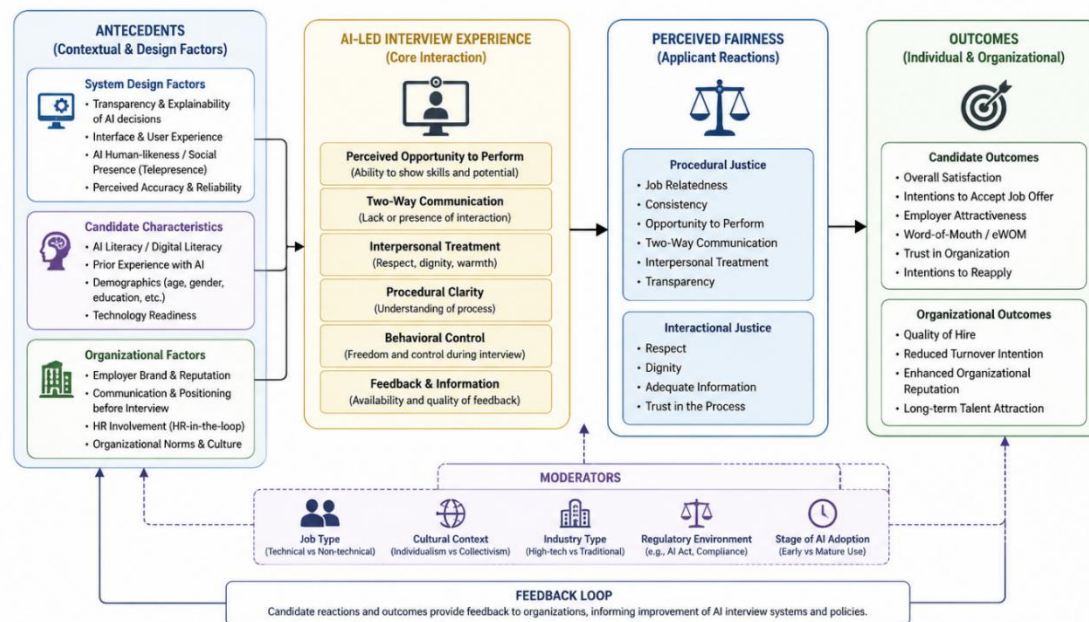
3.5 Meta-Analytic and Review Evidence

In addition to individual reports, the general trends of the candidate reaction to technology-mediated interviewing supported by the evidence found in meta-analysis or systematic review is also generally negative. In a meta-analysis of twelve studies involving more than 1500 participants, Blacksmith, Willford, and Behrend (2016) report moderate and negative mean effect sizes for the impact of interview medium on both interviewer ratings and applicant reactions, leaving them to note that findings gained from FTF interviews can't be extrapolated with confidence to TMI interviews mode: caution problems with inconsistent interview medium among applicants, as this can introduce fairness concerns. More broadly, Köchling and Wehner (2020) in a systematic review of 36 journal articles about algorithmic decision-making in HR recruitment and development, also found that existing knowledge about the potential for fairness and discrimination risks in algorithmic hiring tools is still relatively limited compared to the organizational uptake of these tools, and recommended greater systematic focus on algorithmic risks to HR development and recruitment processes. Complementing this, Woods, Ahmed, Nikolaou, Costa, and Anderson (2020) summarized the limited research supporting the validity and candidate reaction of more general digital-age personnel selection methods, and made a point of calling out the lack of research to validate the methods for their fairness implications for applicants.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Candidate Experience and Perceived Fairness in AI-Led Recruitment Interviews

Source: Developed by the authors based on Gilliland (1993), Acikgoz et al. (2020), Hilliard et al. (2022), Langer et al. (2021), and related literature.

Conceptual Framework: Candidate Experience and Perceived Fairness in AI-Led Recruitment Interviews



The framework integrates Organizational Justice Theory (Gilliland, 1993) with emerging AI-in-HRM literature to explain how design, context and individual factors shape fairness perceptions and outcomes in AI-led recruitment interviews.

The literature review yielded a conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1. The framework highlights three types of factors that impact AI-influenced experiences of the interview session – contextual, organizational, and candidate related – and how those factors relate to applicants' perceptions of procedural and interactional fairness. Those just proscribed fairness perceptions have ultimate influence on organizational attractiveness, application purposes, trust, and so on recruitment outcomes. The model combines Organizational Justice Theory and current sources of research on AI in recruitment to give a complete account of candidate experience when interviewed via AI.

4. Dimensions of Candidate Experience in AI-Led Interviews

4.1 Opportunity to Perform and Self-Expression

One consistent worry found in all the studies is that there is a sense of limitation in perceived opportunity to perform, which the candidates see as a lack of fairness when they have their skills and qualifications judged during the selection process through AI-driven interviews. However, research that piloted several AI-supported selection tools on other phases, including preselection, telephone and video interview, has found that using AI on the latter, more interpersonally challenging phases of the selection process dampened candidates' perceived opportunities to perform, while introducing so-called "emotional creepiness"—a feeling of discomfort about being assessed by a non-human system in an inherently personal interaction. Wehner et al. (2022), who analysed the candidates' affective reactions to such evaluations during the recruitment process found that respectively involving AI in recruitment influenced their emotional reaction, and their perceived ability to clearly demonstrate their skills, regardless of the hiring decision.

4.2 Social Presence and Telepresence

Recent studies have further broken down candidate experience into two sub-dimensions: social presence "feeling like you are communicating with a "socially responsive entity" and telepresence "feeling like you are surrounded by a "mediated interview environment. Recent research has more finely nuances analyses of candidate experience into social presence as contrasted to telepresence "feeling like you are surrounded with a "mediated interview environment" and "feeling like you are interacting with a "socially responsive entity. This research reveals that candidates judge their AII experiences at a procedural level such as fairness and transparency, but also at the level

of what the candidate perceives as a positive or negative experience when interacting with an AII, which impacts on what they infer about the organization's attractiveness and their treatment of staff..

4.3 AI Literacy as a Boundary Condition

Indeed, the same body of work shows that for candidates to report experiencing AI in an interview to affect overall organizational evaluations, their perceived understanding and evaluation of the AI system is considered a boundary condition in this context. Reactions to AI-led interviews seem to reflect not only the specific nature of the interview system, but also the candidates' knowledge and experience of the system.

4.4 Application and Recommendation Intentions

Candidates' perceptions of fairness during the virtual interview carry over to behavioural impacts. Examining why AI-mediated interviews could induce weaker expressions of job application intent, with procedural justice of the interview process and organizational attractiveness as mediating variables, yielded results showing that the interaction of interview type and industry type is predictive of job application intent where perceived procedural justice of the job application process mediates candidates' overall attitudes toward the employing organization. In a similar fashion as Wesche and Sonderegger (2021), their findings in three studies examining candidates' reactions to AI-based selection practices reported in job posting underscored the different impact that AI had on candidates reactions across different selection phases: While AI in the earlier phase in the selection process, screening based on a job application, was evaluated far less negatively, AI in the more interpersonally important interview phase resulted in negative effects on perceptions of organizational attractiveness and intentions to apply. Allegedly, the opposite is also true with job applicants: They are more inclined to say they would suggest an organization to other people looking to find a job when it's a human recruiter, be it over the telephone or in person, versus the AI. Likewise, studies have shown that job applicants are more likely to say they would recommend an organization if it is a human recruiter as opposed to an AI, in either a phone interview or a face-to-face interview, and algorithm aversion is believed to be the cause of this reduced algorithm aversion. Similarly, Lavanchy et al. (2023) also discovered that applications' beliefs about fairness of the algorithmic facilitated recruiting process are affected by the perceived legitimacy of the selection criteria that the algorithm utilizes, such that candidates respond more positively to algorithms they perceived the selection criteria of to be job-relevant and appropriately weighted.

4.5 Synchrony, Media Richness, and Interview Format

AI's involvement with video interviewing takes on an additional layer of candidate experience. Based on the framework of media richness theory, Suen, Chen, and Lu (2019) assessed the perceptions of both synchronous and asynchronous video interviews with and without an AI-based decision agent and found that the synchronous video interview in general, compared to the asynchronous video interview, was rated most favourably, but that the synchronous video interview itself did not significantly affect applicants' fairness perceptions, and that the presence of an AI-based decision agent did not significantly create additional fairness concerns beyond those already associated with the asynchronous video interview. This result adds complexity to the overall literature that associates the lack of fairness with AI-based interviews, as it allows us to distinguish this from the lack of meaningful exchange from the test format (asynchronous, non-interactive, etc.). Speaking in a similar vein, Van Esch, Black and Ferolie (2019) suggested that AI-powered recruitment technology can aid in making more accurate calls during screening and optimize hiring, but advised that appropriate steps should be taken to mitigate issues related to ethics and transparency to prevent harm to candidate trust.

5. Contextual and Design Factors Shaping Fairness Perceptions

5.1 Transparency and Explanation

Explicitly communicating about the use of AI in decision-making, in line with Gilliland (1993)'s emphasis on explanation as a rule of procedural justice, has been shown to increase applicants' view of fairness in the use of AI-selection systems. In the asynchronous video interviews context, Basch and Melchers (2019) reported that providing applicants with information about assessment procedure yielded more positive reactions than when

there was no information, thus suggesting informational transparency can mitigate some of the unfairness concerns linked to less interactive video interview formats. The communication of timelines, assessment steps, and the criteria for assessing each step has also been noted to positively impact informational fairness perceptions more generally and the explicit communication of selection procedures has been shown to improve the overall fairness reactions to a selection system. Langer et al. (2021) built on this work by demonstrating that the manner in which such explanatory information is presented—for instance, outcome versus process information—can differentially affect the applicant's reactions to an automated interview, such that the forthcoming of more process realities typically leads to more favourable reactions than the forthcoming of only outcome.

5.2 Positioning and Sensitisation Interventions

Based on this finding, that candidates' perceptions of fairness to interviewers in general was higher in F2F than compared to AI interviews, the following studies explored whether fairness perceptions could be raised specifically for AI interviews through position, how and who introduced the AI tool to the candidates and sensitisation, potentially informing the applicant beforehand what the process will involve. This study shows that design-level interventions can make a difference in changing perceptions of fairness without necessarily forsaking the use of an AI creative interview system completely, meaning that a significant component of the fairness shortfall in AI interviews is likely due to the design and communication of such systems and not their algorithmic nature. Langer, König, Sanchez and Samadi (2020) were also able to demonstrate that the organizational setting in which a high-tech interview is applied—such as the perceived justifications for the use of automation—had a discernible impact on candidates' willingness to engage with and their attitudes towards the automated interview beyond the characteristics of the interview tool itself.

5.3 Task Type and Individual Differences

Reactions of applicants are not only influenced by process design, but also by other contextual factors. Sheriffing and policing, for example, are tasks that many job applicants believe require clearly human capabilities, like subjective judgments, whereas other jobs, such as analyzing quantitative data, are more mechanical or objective. Candidate reactions to AI-driven interviewing have also been shown to be moderated by individual differences like age and other demographic factors, meaning that examining the candidate must not be neglected: knowing what role they are applying for and who they are is important when examining candidate experience in AI-driven interviewing.

6. Regulatory and Organizational Responses

This fairness shortfall has severely been noted in AI-driven interviewing, leading to regulatory changes and organizational overhauls. The AI Act in the European Union says that when an AI system is used to select candidates, organizations are required to inform them of the use of such technology; in the United States, the AI Video Interview Act in Illinois mandates that organizations make sure they get express candidate consent to analyze video interview submissions performed through AI systems. The regulatory standards formalize as contingencies the informational and procedural transparency which organizational justice studies have historically recognized as key aspects of the perceived justice of candidates.

At an organizational level, researchers have suggested an “AI in the middle” model for implementing AI in selection processes that has been discussed specifically to maintain the candidates' perception of fairness during the preselection, in-selection and post-selection stages of the organization's selection process while leveraging the efficiency gains of AI-driven selection. This is a general trend in the literature, that is, the adoption of AI in recruitment is not just about a question of “yes” or “no,” it's about how AI can be integrated into selection systems to maximize efficiency without directly impacting candidates' experience and fairness.

7. Discussion

As a combined whole, the papers reviewed draw the conclusion that candidate experience during recruitment interviews when powered by artificial intelligence is not easily explained by a single assessment of fairness, and is instead composed of several separate evaluation processes. The link between specific complaints about

procedural process and reactions of candidates to AI-based interviews versus human-based interviews continues to be based on Gilliland's (1993) organizational justice model. Concurrently, newer studies also show that the experience of the mediated encounter goes beyond its procedural evaluation and taps into aspects of the encounter as it is actually experienced, including social presence and telepresence, to shape candidates' subsequent general impressions of the organisation's attractiveness.

An additional significance has to do with malleability. The evidence analysed here does not necessarily mean that AI-driven interviews will cause negative candidate response but is significantly influenced by aspects regarding how the interview is designed and implemented in the context of organisational control (which includes awareness, explanation, positioning and sensitisation). This indicates that reported fairness issues in various studies are an implementation issue rather than insurmountable barriers to the compatibility of AI-led interviews with fairness, and that investing in carefully designed processes and intelligent use of human touch at critical points, and effective communications, can significantly improve candidate experience compared to an AI-only candidate experience.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined the organizational justice-grounded applicant reactions literature, the specific dimensions of applicant experience that are impacted by AI-mediated interviewing, the contextual and design aspects of applicant reactions, and the regulatory and organizational reactions that have been documented to date following recent concerns about applicants' impression of fairness. Overall, the evidence suggests that AI-driven interviews are less procedurally and interactionally fair than human-led interviews, largely due to the lower level of two-way communication, opportunity for performance and behavioural control, which can, however, be meaningfully reduced through more transparent communication, sensitisation stages for candidates and effective process design with human-in-the-loop. Organizations implementing AI at the interview stage of the recruitment process are recommended to communicate clearly and in advance about the role and use of AI in the interview process, to ensure commensurate human oversight at each stage of the interview process, to build appropriate social presence in AI interview design without misinforming users about the nature of the interview, and to manage user AI literacy in considering use of AI interview tools for specific tasks in an interview.

Longitudinal studies that examine the impacts of the AI disclosure requirements as well as how these impacts coexist with organizational design decisions could further elucidate impact of candidate experience in AI-driven interviews in the years ahead, while more research is needed to better understand the interactions between new AI disclosure requirements and organizational design and candidates' final perceptions of fairness and employment choices.

Looking ahead, the future implications of this body of work extend well beyond the interview room itself. As generative and conversational AI systems become more sophisticated, organizations are likely to deploy increasingly naturalistic AI interviewers capable of dynamic follow-up questioning, real-time sentiment analysis, and multimodal assessment of tone, facial expression, and language use. These developments have the potential to either narrow or widen the fairness gap documented in the current literature: greater conversational realism could enhance perceived social presence and two-way communication, yet more pervasive behavioural and biometric analysis could equally deepen candidates' sense of surveillance and loss of control if not accompanied by transparent design and clear communication. Future research would therefore benefit from tracking how rapid advances in AI interviewing technology reshape the specific procedural justice dimensions identified by Gilliland (1993), rather than treating "AI-led interviews" as a static, uniform category.

Future research also carries important practical implications for regulators, employers, and technology vendors. As jurisdictions beyond the European Union and Illinois begin to legislate on algorithmic hiring, comparative and cross-cultural studies will be needed to determine whether fairness perceptions and disclosure effects generalise across different legal, economic, and cultural contexts, or whether region-specific norms around privacy, authority, and technology acceptance meaningfully alter candidates' reactions to AI-led interviews. There is likewise a need for validated, standardized measurement instruments that can consistently capture the multidimensional nature of candidate experience across studies, enabling more robust meta-analytic synthesis

than is currently possible. Additionally, future work should more explicitly examine the intersection of AI-led interviewing with diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes, investigating whether design features that improve average fairness perceptions do so uniformly across demographic groups or instead mask disparate impacts on particular subpopulations of applicants. Finally, longitudinal and field-based studies that follow candidates from the interview stage through onboarding and early tenure would help organizations understand whether early fairness perceptions of AI-led interviews translate into longer-term consequences for employer branding, retention, and organizational trust, thereby giving practitioners a stronger evidence base on which to design AI-enabled recruitment systems that are both efficient and perceived as fair.

“List of Abbreviations

AI – Artificial Intelligence

APA – American Psychological Association

AII – AI Interview (used to denote the AI-based interview interface/interaction)

EU – European Union

F2F / FTF – Face-to-Face (interview)

HR – Human Resources

PSI – Procedural and (Social-)Interactional Justice, as used in Acikgoz et al.'s (2020) study of justice perceptions of AI-based interviewing

TMI – Technology-Mediated Interview(ing)”

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